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## EDITORIAL NOTES

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'Tis time,  
New hopes should animate the world, new light  
Should dawn from new revealings.

— *Browning.*

For the first time, *ab urbe condita*, the citizens of Chicago have had an idea set before them by one of the members of their Board of Education which embodies a new principle in school management and administration. The **New Principle in School Management** unique feature of this idea is found in the proposal to change from the primitive autocratic village educational system which now prevails the country over, in hamlet and metropolis alike, to a modern form more consistent with democratic ideals. The distinctive features of the plan proposed are given in the following statements, quoted, in substance, from the daily press:

1. Redivision of the city into districts each containing from ten to twenty schools.
2. Organization of all the principals and teachers in each district.
3. These organized bodies to act in a supervising capacity in the direction of the educational affairs of the district.
4. Nomination of principals by the district organization of principals and teachers; the superintendent to have the power to veto, and the Board of Education the power to elect.
5. Abolition of the Board of District Superintendents.
6. Substitution, for the present board of six district superintendents, of twelve teachers holding principals' certificates, to be selected by the organized principals and teachers of each district; these teachers to serve as critics.
7. Abolition of the promotional examination feature of the Normal School extension work, and the substitution of a differently organized merit system.

As a study of human nature, it is interesting to observe how

these proposals were received by many members of the Board of Education and, editorially, by the public press.

**Human Nature on Exhibition** There was a great howl; nothing more intelligent, nothing more indicative of calm inquiry or of a disposition toward careful consideration — just a nine days' howl, for which, of course, the board as a whole must not be held responsible since the propositions were not placed officially before it.

The people generally express themselves as being anxious to have a "hard-headed business" administration of their schools.

**Hard-Headed Business Methods** In this case, however, it is worth noting that the reaction of those who succeeded in getting themselves into print stands in strong contrast with the best modern business methods. There is a firm in this city, for example, the largest of its kind in the world, that has achieved its success after a different fashion. This firm pays a cash bonus for any suggestion which an employee can make that can be adopted with advantage to the business. There is a manufacturing concern in southern Ohio that in twenty years has made itself a world-monopoly. Throughout its factories many recording devices are distributed which the employees are invited to use as a means of bringing suggestions to the notice of the firm. Last year out of some fifteen thousand suggestions a majority were carried into effect by the board of administration. The plans adopted by these two firms reflect a far-sighted business policy that does more than anything else to insure in the employees a growing interest and a steadfast loyalty. That is to say, the best type of business man today has learned to quit howling at criticism, and, also, that it pays to leave no stone unturned to secure the intelligent moral support of all his workers.

But with your "hard-headed business" board of education it is different. No other organization on earth is so skittish toward suggestions from the outside. Here is a peculiar phenomenon that is entirely beyond comprehension. Many a man in private life is most unobtrusive and unassuming; willing to get light from any source; modest and diffident in speaking on educational questions. But elect this selfsame man to a board of education and, in most

**An Inexplicable Phenomenon**

cases, within a month an angel from heaven would be unable to teach him anything—would be afraid even to try! Or, in private, he may be a sonorous defender of personal freedom; but once on the board, if he does not immediately begin to round up the teachers and to treat them like a herd, he is the shining exception. It has come to pass in most communities, therefore, that if a teacher were to make a suggestion to a school board, he would attract to himself unfavorable notice, if not suspicion; if he were to persist in such policy, he would be snubbed and probably “transferred” as a warning of even more serious things in store.

Therefore, the thousands of intelligent men and women teachers throughout the country who are in the best position to know what the schools need have their lips hermetically sealed. And, still worse, their minds gradually close up and cease to work upon educational problems in their broad aspects, and they develop, or rather degenerate, into sycophants, cowards, and “stupids.” The attitude of the ordinary school board toward its teachers, touching questions relating to the welfare of the schools, will, in time, turn all except the most stalwart into intellectual and moral runts. Such a policy is “hard-headed” enough; but, as a type of business method, it belongs among the trilobites in the fossil-bearing strata of the Lower Silurian.

In Chicago matters have gone farther. A member of the board was recently criticised in one of the meetings for making use of a communication which he had received from one of the principals. It was held to be in some way a violation of official courtesy due his colleagues. And it now turns out that if one of its own members, even, dares to work out a plan which he thinks might improve the school system, he does so at his own risk—that is, at the certain risk of being met with a howl!

In the present instance Dr. DeBey, the author of the plan outlined above, is peculiarly well qualified to work with intelligence upon school problems. She is a trained teacher, and one of the very few members the board has ever had (I now recall but one other) who have filled and who still could fill acceptably positions in the elementary, high, and normal schools. Her actual schoolroom experience,

**Degeneration  
of Teachers**

**A Well-Qualified  
Board  
Member**

coupled with her lifelong studies in education, if paralleled in some business enterprise, would entitle her ideas to close attention and respect. But the ordinary "hard-headed" business man, when he gets on the school board, has another and a time-honored way of dealing with anything resembling a new idea. He proceeds to show by vituperative methods how utterly impossible it is. It never occurs to those of his type that, if they

**New Ideas  
Tabooed** were to devote as much energy to finding out the good points of a new idea as they do to proving that it is absurd; that, if they really were as anxious to understand a new plan when it is presented as they are to stamp it out; that, if they were as earnest in their effort to devise ways for carrying it into effect as they are to show that it is not practical; that, if they were to assume a position of friendliness and tolerance toward new ideas instead of an attitude of chronic hostility; that, if their influence, which now stands as a bulwark of eternal negation, were to be transformed into a positive force—it never occurs to them that then we should advance educationally as much in five years as we now do in fifty. No enterprise on earth ever grew up under the policy of the habitual objector; to adopt his methods in business is to become an easy mark for the sheriff. Let the objector, therefore, be cast into outer darkness.

When one considers the characteristic attitude of the public mind toward new ideas in education, it need not be thought

**Plan Not  
Understood** remarkable that not one of Dr. DeBey's critics, either on the board or on the editorial staff of the city press, gave much evidence of really comprehending the meaning of the plan which she proposed. How could they have given it that consideration necessary to understand it! Within an hour or two after it was presented to the public, these mighty folk, vociferous with objections, had shown to their own satisfaction the emptiness of the whole scheme. If anyone said, "Let me think it over for a day, or even for fifteen minutes, before I am called upon to express an opinion," no record of such plea for delay has appeared in print.

The propositions laid down by Dr. DeBey, of course, only foreshadow a plan in its barest outline: she evidently intended

nothing more. Before they can be wrought out into a definite working program, there are many details, involving matters of great difficulty, that will have to be studied with much patience and consideration. It is not so much the intention here, therefore, to discuss the numerous details which must enter into the completed scheme, as it is to treat of the spirit and purpose which the plan embodies.

The principle upon which the proposed plan rests is simple, but fundamental, and in its application to educational organization it is almost new. The meaning is this: Under its operation everyone participating in the educational work of the city, from the superintendent and the members of the Board of Education to the humblest teacher, will have a position of influence and worth measured and limited only by his ability to put brains into his work. The chief difficulty in the way of such a plan is that most people have no conception of public life except that under the administration of a boss. The press and public, generally, regard our common-school system as now administered in this country as being of necessity under the control of a boss, though whether this function resides in the superintendent or board of education is, in most places, still an unsettled question. The idea of the boss being uppermost, people jumped to the conclusion, therefore, that Dr. DeBey's plan means that the teachers shall be the boss, and that the collar now worn by themselves shall be placed about the necks of the superintendent and board. It has not dawned upon the average mind that there yet may be a plan evolved which will eliminate the boss, and under which all will have the opportunity and the privilege of co-operating and contributing to the common good up to the limits of their power to help! *That is the spirit of Dr. DeBey's plan, and that is all there is to it.*

To be sure, nobody can object to this on theoretical grounds; it is the *practical* point that really rouses all opposition—it seals the doom of bossism in education. It demolishes bossism by the board and superintendent, and it destroys the hope of bossism by the teachers—probably many teachers themselves do not see this, *but that is*

**The Principle  
Involved**

**Point of  
Objection**

*what it means.* It substitutes for the system of bossism and fear the idea of co-operation and mutual consideration. An educational program based upon this principle is perfectly feasible, and it should be the business of all thoughtful people, on the board and off, to help work it out.

In a small village system the evils of bossism are minimized because the intimate relationship of the superintendent and board to the schoolroom work, which under the circumstances is possible, necessarily encourages and admits of more or less co-operation. But in large cities the evils are increased in proportion as the superintendent and board are removed from an acquaintanceship with the common teacher and the children, until the separation has rendered the situation intolerable for the teachers. For with the idea of the boss goes also the idea of the bossed, and the teacher becomes, in the eyes of the superintendent and board, an "employee" in a derogative sense of the word; whereas the teachers are not their "employees" in the sense that business makes use of this term, nor are they their servants or slaves; they are their collaborators, their colleagues, and their equals. In a lone sentence, a Chicago paper did express the truth when it said: "The trouble which Dr. DeBey finds with the school management is that it reaches from the top downward. She would have it come from the bottom upward." In holding to this view, Dr. DeBey falls in with history. No educational reform, nor any other for that matter, ever began at the top, because those at the top are generally satisfied. Friedrich Froebel struck the keynote of progress in education when he said: "Come, let us live with the children." Had he said, "Come, let us get into the board of education," we might have been without the kindergarten even today. Pestalozzi lived with the children as in a home; had he gotten himself elected superintendent, the regeneration of Germany might never have been realized. It is a profoundly significant fact that all educational progress is made through teachers who are actually

**The Boss and  
the Employee**

at work with pupils. The reason for this is evident, and it brings to the surface once more the essential difference between a teacher and a mere business employee.

**Teacher vs.  
Employee**

The employee is in charge of a section, and may know more than the head of the firm about the details of gloves or shoes; his function, however, never requires him to have that breadth of view which to the head of the house is so essential. But the teacher, always in the presence of the children, *is immediately and eternally confronted with the whole educational problem*. In the store the glove department may be abolished without detriment to the department for shoes; but in the school system nothing can be done that does not profoundly affect for good or ill the teacher's work with her children, because it is for them, finally, that the whole organization exists. It is for this reason, therefore, that, in the future, the superintendents and boards of education will learn to exalt themselves by sitting at the feet of the teacher, that they may know what the children actually need. This will bring to them the true dignity that belongs to high service.

Dr. DeBey's plans, as laid before the public, should receive the closest study and consideration by all friends of popular education for precisely this reason, that she brings to the board a wide and varied experience as a practical teacher. She forms a distinctly new element in the composition of the board, and is able to give her colleagues a point of view that heretofore they have been rarely able to gain.

The plan under consideration not only provides for everyone adequate opportunities for the development of new ideas,

**Teachers Need  
Authority** but it also secures to each the right to have his ideas duly considered, and, still further, to have a voice in determining whether they shall be carried

into effect. Without the latter provision, of course, all else is vanity of vanities. It is too much to expect intelligent men and women to use their time and energy in thinking out reforms, if they are to be denied forever the privilege and opportunity of realizing them. This is the one point, perhaps, which above



all others arouses the bitterest opposition. The unspeakable hypocrisy of the public, that all through the years has been loading the teachers with a mawkish sentiment about the divinity of their work and mission, is baldly exposed by their instant opposition when the teachers seek some effective means of putting their divine ideas into practice. What the politicians and bosses are especially anxious for is that the dear teachers shall retain their divinity and — keep quiet!

It is not intended here to bear down with unnecessary severity upon superintendents and boards of education, nor is the purpose to belittle their great functions in the administration of a school system. Neither does Dr. DeBey's plan contemplate (as the public press assumed it did) reducing superintendents and boards of education to ciphers. On the contrary, it forecasts a higher field of usefulness than either can possibly attain under the present plan. It is frankly proposed that there shall be a general survey of all the functions that belong to a school system, with a view to placing the responsibilities for these functions upon the heads of those who, from the nature of their positions and work in the system, are able to meet them most intelligently. A hue and cry is raised at once because it is assumed that such a plan must diminish the chance for initiative on the part of the superintendent and board. Parenthetically, of course, as against this, the fact that thousands of teachers in the schools of the country are deprived of *all* initiative by the present plan counts for nothing. The truth is, however, that, if under the new plan proposed anyone should fail to find room for initiative, it would be because the individual himself is not blessed with the article. The stimulus toward personal initiative, as a matter of fact, would be immeasurably greater than it is under the present system: greater because, all working together upon common problems, the ideas of each, in order to impress themselves, would have to weigh more than they do now. The consequent uplift to the character of school work would be enormous and general. There would not be a place left in the entire system that a small man could fill.

A plan of school administration which "begins at the bottom instead of at the top" would develop that stability and steadiness in public-school work which are absolutely necessary to a healthy life and growth. The schools would be no longer so closely subject to the mutations of the board and the superintendent. Board members and superintendents must come and go, no matter whether they are elective or appointive. The teaching force is more stable, and its stability would tend to increase because of improved and more settled conditions. It is common at present to seek to secure this desired stability through a long term for the superintendent, or through his repeated re-election. Experience shows, however, that this plan alone brings a curse to the schools oftener than it carries a blessing. It is all because the man—any man—is too small and the school system is too large. A school system that is not so organized as to be bigger than any man in it is no system at all for the democracy of even a village. With the responsibilities for the schools properly distributed among all those who do the work, it would be possible no longer, for the meteoric superintendent, or the transient teacher, or the noisy fellow that by a political accident gets into the board of education, to shake the system of a great city, as he now may do, to its very foundation. The school system must be so organized that, no matter who is elected to any one position, or who is defeated; no matter who lives or who dies, the interests of the children shall remain free from the perils of those who seek public place in order to attain personal ends.

**Greater  
Stability  
Insured**

**A School  
System vs.  
an Individual**

The composition of a school board should be the strongest possible from a business point of view. In a city like Chicago, for instance, with its annual budget of many millions of dollars, the board should include, as it often does, the finest business talent it is possible for the public to secure. In a board of business men, however, one will not often find those who in the development of their commercial careers have been able to keep pace with the growth of pedagogic knowledge. It is for this reason that the teachers should not only have the privilege, they should be required to contribute from their studies and experience to the professional development of the school system.

The brief term on the board which is ordinarily granted to its members, renders it impossible for any business man, no matter how well disposed he may be, to acquaint himself thoroughly with the pedagogic aspect of the school system. No purely business enterprise could grow, or long endure, if it were made subject to the management of so changeable a directorate as that now having entire control of the public schools. It is as though some great business house on State Street were to select groups of teachers from the schoolrooms and place them for brief successive periods in entire charge of its commercial interests. In a word, those who perform certain functions in the school system must be permitted, nay required, to assume corresponding responsibilities; and, conversely, no one must be allowed to assume responsibilities for functions which he does not and cannot perform. Such an organization, through the gradual harmonizing of its teaching, its supervising, and its legislative functions, would develop a unity, a dignity, and an impregnable moral strength that our public-school system hitherto has never known.

Dr. DeBey's plan as yet is not understood, but, in the end, the principle underlying it will win. The time when it can go into operation depends very much upon the teachers themselves. The scheme does not propose benefits for the teachers alone, nor is it the purpose simply to make trouble for the board and superintendent. Neither teachers, nor school boards, nor superintendents have a monopoly of wisdom. They are all subject to the same racial, social, political, and religious prejudices that already have done so much to impair the usefulness of the public schools. Inflamed as many teachers are by present conditions it is not easy for them to see equally well all sides of the questions involved. If their movements are not controlled by a steady sense of justice, by deliberation, fairness, and consideration for all, and, finally, if they do not ever have an eye single to the welfare of the children, their efforts at reform will deservedly fail.

W. S. J.